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## SERMON VII.

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### PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY UNWELCOME TO THE WICKED.

"WHEN Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it."—MATT. 27: 24.

PONTIUS PILATE, who was the Roman Procurator of Judea at the time of the Saviour's passion, was a very wicked man. Profane history gives the record of his venality and extortion, his cruelty and impetuous temper; and the inspired narration by Luke, of his slaying a number of Galilean worshipers, and mingling their blood with their sacrifices, is in full accordance with his general historic character.

To this magistrate Jesus Christ was delivered for judgment, after his apprehension and tumultuous trial before the Jewish Sanhedrim. Pilate knew very well both the innocence of Jesus and the malice of his accusers. From his own conviction, in connection with the earnest expostulations of his wife, he made some direct exer-

tions to pacify the Jews, and save Jesus from their rage; but he was quite careful to do nothing which should compromise his popularity or injure his selfish interests. He had not virtue and decided valor sufficient to resist popular clamor, and hold him to the defense and protection of the innocent in the faithful administration of justice against unprincipled persecutors. He yielded to their turbulent demand, and, in violation of official integrity and of law and conscience, condemned Christ to crucifixion.

But he was quite unwilling to stand responsible for this transaction. He did not mean to meet the consequences of his own deed. He disclaimed all participation in this horrid crime of crucifying a righteous man, and resorted to the empty and impious ceremony of publicly washing his hands in water as the token of his freedom from the guilt, at the very moment that he was lending his own authority to sanction the execution. As if such an idle form could wash the blood-guiltiness from his soul! It only evinced that he was painfully conscious of the wickedness of this whole matter, but that he did not like to be held accountable for it. He deliberately combined his own agency in this bloody business, but he shrank from the consequences of his own conduct.

The providence of God discloses how futile were all such senseless attempts at absolution. The judgments of offended Heaven followed him for the remainder of his days. He was soon recalled from his government; tried for his many enormities, convicted and banished from Rome; dragged out his wretched life in exile, and went into eternity and to the bar of God, as is supposed, by the violence of his own hands.

The whole transaction discloses a fact of general application to humanity, namely:

THAT A WICKED MAN IS UNWILLING TO BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS OWN DEEDS.

The order of discourse will be *to adduce the proof* for this proposition, and then show that *all escape from personal responsibility is utterly impracticable.*

I. A general testimony to the fact of an unwillingness to meet the responsibilities of their own acts is found in the various practices to which wicked men resort that they may keep their consciences quiet. The disingenuous expedients, evasions, and subterfuges to which they have recourse, to avoid the pressure of their accountability, speak the feelings of the heart more emphatically than the lips can pronounce, their utter repugnance to all such convictions of their guilt and its coming consequences. But we will here give the proof in some more particular specifications.

1. *The ready attempt to criminate others.*

When any charge of guilt is applied, either by the man's own conscience or some second person, the wish to avoid the sense of personal responsibility at once appears, in a readiness to exculpate himself as much as possible by attempting to criminate others. Sometimes the effort is made to wholly exonerate himself by throwing the entire criminality of the transaction upon the seduction or solicitation of another; but more often, perhaps, there is allowed the tacit admission that some blame may rest upon himself; yet that others have been so much more involved in the iniquity, that his own share of the guilt is very small indeed; so trifling as hardly to be worth mentioning.

The first sin which was committed in our world, and for which the curse has rested upon all the subsequent generations of its inhabitants, was sought to be extenuated in this very process. When God arraigned Adam, and demanded from him why he hid from his Maker, and who told him that he was naked—his fall had already so completely extinguished all that was honest and ingenuous in his spirit, that his first attempt was to excuse himself by criminalizing another: "The woman, whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." How sadly changed had Adam become! But a little while since, and the depth and purity of primitive conjugal affection would have induced him to shield from all harm that partner of his bosom, at the expense of any personal hazard. But now, to save himself from the consequences of his own act, he would expose her to the first stroke of the divine displeasure! The same effect was also wrought in the woman by her sin. Instead of a frank and honest confession, there was the like attempt to palliate her guilt by transferring the blame to another: "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."

This early example has been imitated by the following generations of their children. The frequency of the facts precludes the necessity of adducing particular examples, where the ready attempt is made to stifle the convictions of conscience, and silence the voice of God, by spreading the criminality of the wicked deed—either through their solicitation or participation—over as broad a number of others as they can. And how conclusively does this prove the very proposition we are now discussing—that a sinner is not willing to bear the consequences of his own deeds? If the man was ready to stand answerable for his own conduct, he would readily separate his own from all others, and look at the moral character of his acts in the full light of his own personal responsibility. He would at once trace the disastrous consequences of his sin back to his own agency, and instead of the baseness which attempts to relieve itself at the expense of others, he would frankly acknowledge before the world all his guilt, and cry, Thus and thus have I offended. Like David, under the influence of pious humility, he would say: "Is it not I that have sinned and

done evil indeed ; but as for those sheep, what have they done ? Let thine hand, I pray thee, O Lord my God, be upon me, but not upon thy people, that they should be plagued." When we deem that we have done well, we vindicate the virtue of the good deed to our credit, and gladly assume the worthy reputation that may be accorded to us ; but when the consequences of our wickedness are about to overtake us, we put off as much of these as we can upon others, and strive to alienate our own responsibility in the guilt. We thus prove our unwillingness to be held answerable for our own wickedness.

2. *Excusing himself, because another happens to stand nearer to the final issue of the sin.*

The sense of responsibility seems to be weakened in proportion to the distance that the sinner can remove the issue of the sin from the point of his own agency. He quiets his conscience by interposing as many links in the series as he can, between that which is connected to his own act, and the final one that has brought out the mischief. Though all have been combined in the procurement of the ultimate evil, yet the intervening agents help the mind to exclude from itself the painful consciousness of its own guilty participation. Wherever you may detect the disposition to take advantage of this delusion, and lay the burden of blame upon such as may have stood more immediately connected with the direct consummation of the iniquitous process, you may rest assured that there you have found the man who is not willing to stand honestly forth and abide the consequences of his own conduct.

So the Scribes and Pharisees, in concert with Judas, arranged their plan for the apprehension of the Saviour. They present the bribe, and pay over the stipulated price of the treachery ; they send out with the traitor their own officers and soldiers to carry the scheme into execution ; and yet, when the great crime had been consummated, and Jesus was in bonds before them, and the dreadful deed was harrowing the soul of Judas, so that he was forced to throw the money at their feet, and cry out, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood," they coolly put away all the guilt of the transaction from themselves, and transfer the whole responsibility to him. Because he had been the direct instrument in the perpetration of the deed of wickedness, though all were involved in the guilt, they could with great self-complacency reply : "What is that to us ?—see thou to that." They make the immediate agent to bear all the consequences of the common transaction, and thus stupefy their consciences while they go on with the bloody work of crucifying Jesus, and Judas hangs himself.

In unnumbered ways you may detect the operation of the same delusion in modern days. You will find one man receiving the



fruits of some dishonest speculation, or the gains of some immoral transaction, and yet transferring the responsibility over to some agents who may be more immediately engaged in transacting the business; while, most likely, those very agents are at the same time shuffling off their responsibility by throwing the whole burden of the guilt back upon their employer. You may see, all around you, the men who are engaged in throwing abroad in the community those things which can not circulate without public injury to property, morals, health, or life; and yet all ready to transfer their responsibility to some others who may come after them, or may stand out more prominently in the common work of desolation. A man may thus be connected in some way with the profits of counterfeiting the current coin or circulating-notes of trade, of gambling-houses, infidel or licentious publications, opening at the fountain-head or directing along down the fiery streams of intemperance; and yet assiduously putting off from himself, and putting on to some others, all the burden of the responsibility. Although every link in the combination is connected with the resulting evils, and stained with the guilt of the propagated iniquity; yet no one is ready ingenuously to own and bear that which is his, but throws it off upon his fellows, obstinately forgetting that the hand of righteous retribution will one day bring back the load, and hang it like a mill-stone about his own neck.

Why this universal effort to so transfer accountability? Why look at consequences only through another's agency? Why seek to make another answerable for that in which your own agency or interest is willingly combined? No other answer can be given, than that a wicked man is not willing to meet the consequences of his own deeds.

3. *The frequent reference of his wickedness by the sinner to a divine constitution.*

This form of delusion for evading the sense of personal responsibility is more subtle, and may sometimes appear more plausible, than those before adduced; but it is also more impious, inasmuch as it seeks to involve the divine character in complicity with human iniquity. Wherever, in the many ways of attempting it, a sinner pleads some necessity in the nature of the case, and shields himself behind some assumed divine constitution of things which has made his sin inevitable, there is in it, at once, full evidence that he is unwilling to answer for his own deeds.

From a very early age, men have been in the habit of practicing this self-deception. The old Jewish cavilers used this proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." "The way of the Lord is not equal." The Apostle Paul had also to deal with the same evasion: "Why doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will?" Ancient transgressors, averse to the convictions of their own accountability,

were accustomed to say in the midst of their enormities: "We are delivered to do all these abominations." Wicked doers in modern days, for the same reason, flee to the same false-refuges and deceitful hiding-places. When pressed by Gospel truth to immediate obligations of holiness and Christian feeling and action, some plea of inability is at once interposed as a valid objection to all effort, and a sound excuse for all impenitence. "I can not change my own heart." "I have no religious anxiety, and I can not feel, until the Holy Spirit work in me and move to feeling." "This is all a divine work, and depends wholly on God's sovereignty, and if I am elected to eternal life I shall be saved, and if not, I must perish, do what I may. The work is altogether in God's hand, it is not at all for the creature to attempt to take it out." With a more open perversion, others affirm that our very propensities and appetites which induce to indulgence, and bind down in sensuality and sin, are just such as our Maker has implanted within us, and designed should control us; and when fully brought out in its infidelity to all obligation, it becomes in plain language, this—"That Almighty God overrules all things, and we are doing that precisely which he designed and desires we should."

And now, impious, and even blasphemous, as is the real charge against God in all these attempted evasions of personal accountability for personal deeds, yet do they all most strikingly prove how strenuously a wicked heart reluctates all such convictions. It determines not to bear its own burden, but rather to cast the whole off upon God. It is no part of the present design to expose this sophistry, and make the truth to shine upon the very point of the delusion; but only to adduce the fact as one of the evidences of the sinner's deep desire to deceive himself in this matter. In some of these forms the delusion is very frequent; and because the expression of it is sometimes a very plausible imitation of sound, orthodox truth, it becomes the more specious, and thereby the more dangerous, but not one whit the less wicked. It is such a charge against infinite holiness, and for such a purpose, that God will never tolerate it, nor would a frail worm of the dust dare to make it, were it not that while persisting in sin, he would rather do any thing than admit the full convictions of his guilt to come in upon his conscience. In the most emphatic manner, they bring their proof to the point, that a wicked man can not bear the consequences of his own conduct.

4. *The universal fact of repugnance when the pressure of responsibility upon the sinner is made.*

All examples of holding wicked men to a direct account, prove that it is exceedingly irksome to them. The outward expression abundantly discloses the heart's deep aversion to it. In the first family, the stern inquiry was made of Cain: "Where is Abel thy

brother?" The conscience of the murderer foreboded the account that was to be rendered, and the falsehood and evasion shows how repugnant it was to him. "I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?" So Ahab hated Micaiah, because he indicated the righteous retributions that were coming upon him, and "did not prophesy good concerning him, but evil." The Jews of Christ's generation hated him, and went about to slay him, because he "testified of them that their works were evil." His disciples charged them with the guilt of being his betrayers and murderers, and they gnash their teeth and determine that they shall not bring this man's blood upon them. It had been their deliberate and long-determined crime, but they repelled the charge of accountability for it. And so, in all cases of every age. The charge of guilt, which stirs the convictions of personal responsibility, always awakens restlessness, impatience, repugnance, and, if faithfully and perseveringly pressed, the feelings soon rise to hatred and malignity.

Try this case now with any delinquent; bring up fully and pungently his sense of direct accountability for his wickedness, and if he does not become a penitent and return to the paths of righteousness, you will surely find something in the manner with which he treats your honest fidelity, which will fully satisfy you that he does not like this drawing of the cords of responsibility close and strong upon his conscience. He may meet it with many excuses; may protest that he had no evil intentions; that there was the force of strong temptations, or that now he has formed decided good resolutions; he may keep cool or become excited; treat you courteously or offensively; but in every case that you make the claim felt, you will see something to wake the infallible conviction in your own mind that his heart does not love to feel it, and that it intends to escape from all recognition of it, just as soon as possible.

This is, thus, every where true of depraved human nature; it is utterly intolerant of the conviction that it is about to take the consequences of its own action.

II. But I proceed to show—that *all avoiding of personal responsibility is wholly impossible*. This is manifest—

1. *From the integrity of the divine Government.*

Under an administration of strict justice, God holds each man to account for his own conduct, and proceeds rigidly upon the determination that "the soul that sinneth it shall die." Under an administration of grace a substitute is provided, and through faith in His name, a way of escape from condemnation is offered; but if this plan of redemption be rejected, the sinner stands still as directly responsible in his own name as he did before. Under both Law and Gospel the principle is the same in this respect, that "every one must give an account of himself before God." This

is from no arbitrary determination, but in accordance with equity and righteousness. If any disobedience in heart or life has been effected by the subject against God's commandments, there is in it a specific amount of guilt. Varying as this may from the light given, the former favors received, and the recklessness or maliciousness of the transgression, there is in each case its own proper desert, and as a matter of fact, this specific degree of guilt attaches to the person who committed the sin. The only question possible then is this, Will the Eternal Sovereign of this government detect this guilt, and make an exact estimate of the demerit of the transgressor? Will an omniscient God see and judge of facts just as they are? If he does, then the sinner must stand responsible beyond all possibility of escaping. In point of fact, there is so much guilt, involving desert of so much punishment; and as the guilt is his so the punishment must be his, if that government preserve its integrity. If God maintain his government, and as Judge of all the earth do right, then can no disobedient soul escape the final answer. He must remove himself beyond the reach of Him who filleth immensity with his presence, or just that which should be done, God will see truly is done, in the case of every sinner. God's government is really on trial to the same principles of immutable equity as the sinner, and the integrity of that government can be forfeited in no possible case of overlooked and unjudged delinquency.

2. *From the immutable Law of Conscience.*

The sense of responsibility is invariable in every man, to just the extent and in precise accordance with the truth that reaches his conscience. No man can feel remorse for what in truth he deems to be his well-doing; and no man can feel self-approbation for that which he deems to be his evil-doing. His belief in the Bible, or his infidelity, makes no difference in this respect, for there is but one law of conscience to the race of humanity, that every man shall have the conviction that what he deems to be his virtue exalts him, and what he deems to be his sin debases him. If the truth of his iniquity come home to him, and his sin find him out, he knows that he must bear it. His conscience makes him blush for his wicked conduct, even when alone and in darkness.

An obstinate transgressor may, and often does, banish reflection, embrace error, and thus suppress or pervert the truth; but when truth comes, he can not evade the personal responsibilities which it brings with it. If he could always use those delusive expedients, or avail himself perpetually of those engrossing pursuits, which shut off the light from his soul, to such an extent he might exclude the convictions of his accountability. But this is impossible to him. Even in this life, and often amid all their business and social engagements, the light of truth flashes in upon the consciences of wicked men, and all the opiates of worldly employment or pleasure can not make them slumber. Beyond the grave, the light of

eternity must be irresistible, and every heart be forced to read the message which the truth brings to it. Wherever this is, it is an invariable law of the conscience, thus enlightened, to fasten the conviction that the soul is answerable for every sin. The man may dread all this, shrink from it, cower under it, or harden in hatred against it; but where, with the constancy of a divine purpose, the truth is thus kept perpetually blazing forth, there can be no forgetfulness of the sinner's responsibility. Whether on earth or in eternity, when the soul sees its sin as it is, it puts the charge of guilt directly back upon itself, and knows that it is its own concern, and not another's—not God's to answer for it.

So long as this law of conscience remains an inseparable part of our being, there is no alienating our sense of accountability. We may pass through all the vicissitudes of the most variable experience; may wander from country to country, and traverse oceans and continents; yea, pass on through the valley of the shadow of death, and over into the region of the spirit-land; but inseparable from us must our consciousness of responsibility be, because this law of our moral being is still with us, and a part of us.

*3d. The wrong act leaves its impression upon the sinner himself.*

Every sinful outward word and deed, and every secret thought and purpose of the mind, reacts upon the mind itself and leaves its own impression there as upon an ineffaceable tablet. Aside from all the influence our sin may exert upon others, it puts its imperishable impression upon our own minds. Whether it may have induced carelessness, stupidity, blindness of mind, or a desperate recklessness of spirit, the effect in every way is left behind it upon the transgressor himself, and the revealing of the coming day of trial will present the real fact, the immutable record. As sure as the character you form is your own; as certain as the subject your sin affects is your soul, so certain must the impress which your own action has made upon it, abide with it, and be utterly inseparable from it. You can, therefore, from the very nature of the case, alienate your responsibility only by transferring your personal identity. You, a personally existing agent, putting your own stamp of character upon yourself by your own deeds, must wear that character and take its consequences through this life, and into whatever future world you may go.

This terrible truth is taught us by every day's observation. In this life, the young man forms character, and fixes his habits, socially, in business operations, or in moral bearing; and then wears that character, and lies under the force of those habits through all his subsequent experience. What he has done to himself remains permanently stamped upon himself; and through all his walks of business, society, and domestic experience, that impression subjects him to take its inseparable consequences. He



answers, through all his mortal life, to those results of his own agency upon himself, whatever they may be.

And so, especially, in a religious point of view. You may look upon some aged man, with hoary head and trembling limbs, whose footsteps are already upon the threshold of an eternal state, but who by his own acknowledgment and the fears of all his friends has not made that provision for the future to which the Gospel invites. Through a long life he has been an attendant upon Gospel ordinances, and an outward respecter of the Sabbath day and its religious services. In childhood and youth he was the subject of frequent seriousness and anxious convictions. For one reason after another he put them all by, and deferred his submission of heart to God till he passed on to manhood. Then the busy scenes of active life, secular transactions, and pecuniary responsibilities accumulated and pressed upon him, sometimes half-awaked by a faithful sermon, a short sickness, a sudden death, but a surfeit from his multiplied engagements quieted all again to sleep, and he has thus passed on to old age, where we now find him without hope and without God in the world. That heart which once was quick to feel, is now insensible; the truth which once moved him is now quite powerless, and by his own declaration, and the belief of his friends, it seems now too late to change. Look back to those former scenes of tenderness and inquiry, and the repeated acts of procrastination or resistance which sent them all away; and where have the consequences fallen? On whom have the effects accumulated? Oh! there he now stands, a most affecting monument to testify that it is his own heart that was hardened, and his own conscience that became seared by his own action. His soul has ripened for a cheerless and hopeless death-bed, and he is just passing into eternity to stand before the last tribunal and receive the righteous retributions for just that character which he himself has formed. He must meet the consequences of his own action.

#### INFERENCE.

##### 1. *The debasing effect of all sin.*

I do not urge you, here, to look at sin in the light more frequently presented. The more obvious consequences of sin are the pains and sorrows of humanity; the great curse resting upon a fallen race as doomed to toil, and sickness, and ultimate death; and the bad passions engendered by it, in hatred, distrust, revenge, and jealousy, inducing perpetual violence and deeds of cruelty; and then the revealed punishments in the world to come, where "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

But the subject as now presented gives its odious features in a



new light. It is intrinsically hateful and consciously debasing. Those who practice it, who love it, and are ready to make all possible apologies for it; even they are unwilling to stand responsible for it. Deep in the consciousness of every sinner, even the most openly abandoned and hardened, there is still the forced recognition that it is an abominable thing. They shrink from owning it; they hate the light which exposes them; they are afraid or infuriated when their sins are set in order before them. Its best friends, in all this, show that they feel its turpitude, and can only meet it with a conviction of their pollution and shame. Even the devil is obliged to feel that his sin debases him, and every child of the devil in his consciousness of guilt is also conscious of his degradation and debasement thereby. There is not a wicked being in the universe who can, even alone, look directly upon his wickedness and not feel that it has made him vile and odious. He stands self-reproached in his own sight. And if to the sinner himself his sin is such an occasion of reproach and debasement, how vile must it appear to all who are pure and holy! The greatest punishment of sin is in this conscious loss of all that is noble and worthy, and the perpetual sense of all that is reproachful and base. "The spirit of a man can sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" When the soul itself has lost its dignity, and the man must blush in shame for his own vileness, what can sustain him? All the good despise him, and he is a reproach in his own eyes. Where can there be relief? Well may he cry: "My punishment is greater than I can bear."

## 2. *The manliness of virtue.*

This only is worthy in man, that he be in a condition to meet his deeds, and ready to stand answerable for them. His inner conviction of ill-desert unmans the sinner, and his own conscience makes him a coward. But the man whose life is pure and his conscience undefiled, finds nothing within or without greatly to disturb him. "He has rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." It depends not upon another's favor, nor another's good opinion of him, whether he shall have a serene spirit; he stands upon his own conscious integrity, and no adventitious circumstances will, very much, either elate or depress him. Popular favor or partial flattery may fill the heart with self-conceit, but the deep conviction of an honest mind and a sincere spirit, keeps the soul self-complacent and self-possessed in manly dignity. A firm purpose in virtue always adorns and ennobles.

And such an inheritance lies open to all. He who is conscious of former iniquities, may repent and reform; and he who has kept his integrity amid his responsibilities to his fellow-man, may still persevere and grow firmer and worthier in righteousness. And while all must blush in guilt and shame before the searching eye of God, yet is there provision made whereby the self-de-

based and self-condemned may come before the divine Presence, with a humility that is filled with manly boldness. Godly sorrow for past wrong-doing is not debasing, but truly ennobling; and the sinner can in no way so truly exalt himself in his own sight, as by the most hearty repentance and confession before God. The soul recovers itself from its degradation, when in contrition there has been the hearty cry: "Search me O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Such a heart can rest confidently on atoning mercy, and feel the joy of Gospel justification, and the elevation of Gospel adoption, even while bowing with covered face before God in penitent confession. The true penitent does not dissemble nor cloak his transgressions; does not shrink from the charge of guilt, and the conviction of personal responsibility; makes no delusive apologies, and relies on no formal absolutions; but is as honest in saying, "Thus and thus have I offended," as in praying, "O Lord, blot out my transgressions, and remember not against me my sins." Conscious integrity and penitent humility have each an inherent manly dignity.

3. *The whole subject has its peculiar application to the young.*

All men naturally, sinfully, basely, shrink from meeting the responsibility of their wicked deeds. This begins with the first consciousness of wrong-doing. The child is as averse to exposure and accountability for sin as is the adult, and we may be sure that youth are in constant danger of allowing such a habit to ripen into confirmation. It can not be inappropriate to apply the truth now attained for direct caution.

You sin, in some particular of spirit or life, in some known deed or neglect, and the natural course is, to shut out a sense of responsibility for it. If this prevails, you soon have the habit fixed upon you. You learn to excuse sin to yourself and others, then to conceal, and then to deny it. You thus stupefy conscience, and of course continue in it. Thus your sin perpetuates itself; and the habit of extenuating, makes way for perpetually repeating your wrong-doing, and the iniquity, whatever it may be, has thus become confirmed. Many things which greatly dishonor Christianity, become in this way common among professed Christians. Youth are especially so deluded.

The cure is—Keep alive and quick within you your sense of personal responsibility. You will be cautious of your next act, when your heart is open to feel that you will be responsible for it.

Your conduct is from your own will; the responsibility yours; of course, therefore, the repentance must be yours—the confession—the reformation. That of another can not meet your account.

Be quite in the habit of bringing this truth home to the con-

science. I must take the consequences of what I am and what I do. Why disguise this, when you can not alter it? Why be like a man that willfully shuts his eyes amid pits and precipices which threaten a thousand deaths, because he fears to know the worst, and yet blindly walks onward? There is truth; you can find it. If it pain and condemn you, let it do so. If it is truth, better meet it now: it will not alter. Let us all so use it, that we need not fear to meet it.

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## SERMON VIII.

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### THE MANNER OF KEEPING THE SABBATH.\*

"REMEMBER the Sabbath day to keep it holy."—EXODUS 20: 8.

I do not now propose to vindicate the divine *institution* of the Sabbath. That it is a day set apart by God himself, consecrated to a holy purpose, and made binding upon mankind throughout all ages of time, has been too frequently demonstrated by arguments that carry conviction to all reasonable minds, to require any labor from me in this brief service. When we consider that a hebdomadal period of rest and devotion is rendered necessary by the physical, the intellectual, the moral, and the religious wants of the human race; that in view of this necessity the first act of the Almighty after the work of creation was, to institute such a rest, and, to give infinite sanction to the institution, *rested himself* on the appointed day, from all his work; that he blessed the day, sanctified it, and proclaimed it the rest of the Holy Sabbath unto the Lord; that he reëffirmed the same amid the thunder and smoke of Sinai, and wrote its observance with his own finger upon the tables of stone, as an everlasting law; that throughout the theocratic age, in which God was both spiritual and temporal Ruler, he did in *both* these relations enjoin the keeping of the Sabbath as holy time, by the most solemn and mighty of all sanctions; that during the time of kings, judges, and prophets in Israel, down to the Christian era, the sacred observance of the Sabbath was perpetually commanded and enforced, and its heavenly beauties chanted in hymns of solemn praise; and when we consider, that although the *necessity* for a Sabbath exists till the end of time, this necessity does not itself indicate any one day in

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preference to another, and that the wisdom of God, which secures subordinate ends along with the main one, at the creation of the world chose the *last* day of the seven for the Sabbath, because it fitly commemorated the great work which he had *then* completed, but that he regarded the work of redemption *greater* than that of creation, and hence that the same reason which designated the seventh day for the Sabbath under the old dispensation, designated the first day under the new, each alike immediately following the completion of the great work which it commemorates; that the Lord's day, or the day on which the Lord arose victorious over death and hell, became thenceforth the sacred Sabbath; that on this day the disciples assembled for worship, on this day the Lord appeared to them, on this day they celebrated his supper and received his richest effusions of grace, on this day both they and their immediate successors *continued* to assemble for divine worship, throughout all the formative ages of the Christian Church; when we consider that for more than eighteen hundred years this has been regarded by the entire Christian Church as *the* Sabbath day holy unto the Lord, and that communities and nations have received special tokens of divine favor in their spiritual and their temporal interests, according as they have been faithful in its observance; when we consider all this, if we still doubt of the divine institution and sacred claims of the Sabbath, we may well despair of having our incredulity vanquished by any power of demonstration, whether human or divine. Yes, the demonstration has been fully made; it is complete; nothing can be added to it, and nothing shall be taken from it. If any one thing is made sure, it is the divine institution of the Christian Sabbath and its sacred demands upon the human race till the end of time. The Sabbath of earth shall not cease, till its golden light blends in the brighter beams of the eternal Sabbath in heaven.

My main point, therefore, now is, not to prove the divine institution of the Sabbath, and our obligation to observe it, but to consider *how* we are to observe it, or what is implied in *keeping it holy*.

And here our duty is both *negative* and *positive*. In the right observance of this day, there are some things which we must *not* do, and there are other things which we *must* do.

#### I. Let us first take the negative view.

1. We are forbidden to *do any work* upon the Sabbath day. "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it *thou shalt not do any work*, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man servant, nor thy maid servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates." Thus broad and sweeping is the prohibition. All secular labor, of every kind, must on that sacred day be entirely

suspended. Even the unnecessary work of gathering sticks upon the Sabbath, was punished by God in the most terrible manner. While the children of Israel were in the wilderness, says the historian, "they found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation; and they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the Lord said to Moses, The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died, as the Lord commanded Moses."

It may be supposed that the Gospel has *mitigated* the law of the Sabbath. The importance and the sacredness of the Sabbath remain precisely the same as ever; the essential penalty of profaning it is therefore unabated; but the form and the relative delay of this and of all penalties, are modified to the nature of the Gospel dispensation. They are more strictly spiritual, and are projected more into eternity, under the new than under the old dispensation, because the realities of eternity are more fully revealed to us than they were to the ancients. Penalties were quicker, more obvious, more earthly under the former dispensation than they are now, but they were no greater nor surer. The forbearance of the Gospel, great and merciful as it is, is not an indulgence. Sooner or later the profaner of the Sabbath will meet a retribution no less appalling than that which the Israelites did when they profaned it. Neither Christ nor his apostles abated in the least the rigorous demands of this law. We must remember that this is not a part of the ceremonial but of the *moral* code, concerning which Christ said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot nor tittle of the law shall fail." To lead an ox or an ass to the watering, to pluck the ears of corn and eat to satisfy the demands of hunger, and to heal the sick, are not "*work*," in the proper sense of that word; and the caviling Jews knew it as well as Christ. These were simply deeds of *mercy* and of *self-preservation*, made right by the same necessity which gave rise to the Sabbath itself. There is not an instance in the recorded life of Christ, or of his disciples, in which they gave the least possible sanction to the doing of secular "*work*" upon the Sabbath. Was Christ bred a carpenter? Never did the sound of his saw or hammer break the sacred silence of the Sabbath. Were James and John and Peter fisherman? Never were their boats launched or their nets spread on that holy day. Was Paul a lawyer? Never did he listen to the story of his client or consult the statutes upon the Sabbath. All the early Christians, not less than the Jews before them, were strict to the very letter of the law in abstaining from all *work* upon the holy day.

And our immediate ancestors were stricter than we are in this respect. They so finished up their work upon Saturday evening, so arranged for their meals, and for other necessities upon the Sabbath, as to leave as little as possible to be done on that day. We must return to that principle and adhere firmly to it, or we shall forfeit the favor of heaven. What then shall we say of those, who deliberately plan to work upon the Sabbath?—who drive their teams, operate their canal-boats, cultivate their grounds, gather their harvest, toil in their shops; who visit their counting-rooms, consult their ledgers, cast up their accounts; who employ their minds in anxious thinking and contriving for worldly gain; and all this just because they do not agree with God that six days is enough in which to labor and do all their work, but they must needs, in violation of his most solemn command, take the seventh day also?—what shall we say of all such? That they have a fearful reckoning with their Judge, and the day of their calamity lingereth not.

2. We are forbidden to make the Sabbath a *day of pleasure*. The blessings of God to his ancient people were conditioned thus: "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, *from doing thy pleasure* on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable, and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, *nor finding thine own pleasure*, nor speaking thine own words, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father." The Sabbath when devoted to pleasure is not more profaned, but it is more debased than when devoted to labor. The Sabbath-breaker by work may be as *great* a sinner as the Sabbath-breaker by pleasure, but he is not so *base* a sinner. To desecrate time holy to God to worldly pleasures, marks a most fearful stage of depravity. Nor does it seriously matter what *kind* of pleasure it is, whether it is sensual, rational, social, or literary, if it is pleasure apart from religion. As there is a time for all things, there is doubtless an appropriate time for innocent pleasures, but that time is certainly *not* upon the holy Sabbath. What then shall we say of those who desecrate the day, or portions of it, to drinking, gambling, gluttony, licentiousness, and other vicious practices? They are guilty of a *double* crime: first, of doing that which ought *never* to be done; and secondly, of doing it in profanation of the Sabbath. They are in the last stages of guilt; their feet are already beginning to slide.

But there is another and numerous class of Sabbath-breakers, who are such by doing upon the Sabbath what may be, at least to some extent, lawful on other days. In this class we must include those who give and receive social entertainments, who indulge in pleasure walks and rides, who devote portions of the day to feasting and mirth; those also who give themselves to secular studies



and reading, not only of novels or of more staid and substantial literature, but even of much that passes for religious periodicals. There is no small portion of matter even in our religious papers, yes, even in our Sabbath-school books, that is not suitable to be read upon the Sabbath. Whatever furnishes mere worldly and secular knowledge, or affords only entertainment, amusement, pleasure, is not appropriate to the holy Sabbath, even for the youngest child. The child indulged in such dainties upon the Sabbath, is spoiled in the training, and even should grace interpose to save him, he will be a wretched spiritual dyspeptic through life. It is very important that children be made happy, especially in their relations to religion, but it is a sad mistake to attempt to make them happy by giving them mere secular entertainments upon the Sabbath.

All pursuits, no matter what they are, whose object is *mere pleasure*, are utterly foreign to the sacred purposes of this holy day.

2. The Sabbath is not to be made *a day of sloth*. It is a day for *rest* but not for *sleep*. If sleeping is keeping time holy, then every night while we sleep is made as holy as the Sabbath. The body requires *rest* from labor, but it requires no more sleep during the twenty-four hours of Sabbath than on other days. The man who spends the Sabbath in lounging and dozing, more enfeebles than invigorates his body.

The *intellect* as well as the body requires rest. Clergymen, whose vocation calls for special mental effort upon the Sabbath, find it necessary to rest upon the following day. Those who fail to allow their minds an amount of repose tantamount to one day in seven, are not long able to endure the labors of their profession. But mental rest is found in *change*. It is not so much in doing *less* as in doing something *else*, that the mind regains its exhausted vigor. The laboring man who spends the Sabbath as he ought, gives his mind *more* activity, perhaps, upon that day than upon others; but it is a kind of activity that relieves it of the burden which it has borne through the week, and prepares it to resume that burden with renewed vigor for the week to come; while the merchant, the politician, the professional man, finds in the calm and elevated devotions of the Sabbath the only adequate repose from the bustle and vexations of secular time. Heaven is an eternal rest, but not an eternal sleep; and the sacred observance of the Sabbath, like the employment of heaven, is at the farthest possible remove from stupor and sloth. If then we would not profane the Sabbath, we must rise as early, eat and drink as prudently, and husband the time as vigilantly, upon that day as upon the other days of the week.

We have thus far taken only the negative view. But the sacred observance of the Sabbath implies vastly more than compliance with a system of restrictions. Something positive is to be *done*;

and that something is so important, so solemn, so momentous, as to make it very obvious why we are forbidden to do the things disallowed on that day. The things to be done can have no fellowship with the things forbidden. The human mind can not adjust itself to the two at once. However lawful and even important in their several appropriate places, they can not both be done at the same time, at least in the most perfect and effective manner.

II. Let us then briefly notice the *positive* duties implied in keeping the Sabbath holy.

1. Portions of the Sabbath should be devoted to *public religious worship*. The public worship of God was solemnly enjoined and practiced through the entire period of the former dispensation, and was even incorporated with the sacred observance of the Sabbath. Indeed all pagan nations have some forms of public worship, and the more cultivated of them, as the Greeks and Romans, erected for this purpose temples and altars. Sometimes they built temples to "unknown gods;" so urgent is the instinct in man to worship. But in the Christian religion the public worship of "the only living and true God," is instituted with a simplicity and a distinctness beautifully appropriate to its sublime object. We are here taught to worship God "*in spirit and in truth*." While Christ was upon earth he worshiped thus with his disciples; and after his death they were accustomed to assemble for the same worship upon the Christian Sabbath; thus transmitting to us, by their example as well as teaching, not only the institution itself, but the nature of the service enjoined. This public worship of God is not designed to supersede private devotion, nor any personal and relative duties whatever, but to provide for the social religious principle of our nature, to afford us opportunity to pay our united homage to our common Lord and Saviour, and thus to anticipate upon earth the eternal worship above.

Hence the neglect of public worship is a profanation of the Sabbath. All those who absent themselves from the house of God upon the Sabbath for any other object than one of absolute necessity or mercy, as in case of personal sickness or care of the sick, violate the command to keep the Sabbath holy, and will sooner or later be overtaken by its dreadful penalty. They may not see it directly behind them; they may not believe that it will ever reach them; but overtake them at last, it will, as surely as God reigns. Oh! that the thousands of thoughtless neglecters of the worship of God would consider this! Many seem to regard attendance at the house of God as little else than a *compliment to the preacher*, which they are of course at liberty to bestow or to withhold, according as they may judge it to be deserved. Hence the question of their attendance at church, depends with them upon the eloquence of the preacher! Awful profanation of God's sacred

institution! God never made it to depend upon the preacher at all. If the preacher is in fault, so be it. God will judge him. But this does not justify the delinquency of the people. They are bound to attend at the sanctuary, as commanded, to *worship God*, and there to worship him in spirit and in truth, with such aids as it furnishes, and to the best of their ability. If they can obtain assistance in worship from him who is their appointed mouth in prayer and their spiritual teacher, let them be devoutly thankful for this assistance; but at all events, let them not fail, as they would not forfeit the blessing of heaven, to repair to the house of God, and there lay the public sacrifice of contrite and believing hearts upon his public altar.

If all would habitually and faithfully thus worship God in his house, there would be little of fault-finding with the ministrations of the pulpit, imperfect as they are; while the ministrations themselves would greatly improve. Instead of the morbid craving for something new and exciting, beautiful and sublime, or ludicrous and startling, would be an earnest hungering and thirsting for the pure bread and water of life, to which the ministrations of the sanctuary would naturally adapt themselves. Let ministers and people thoroughly reform in this matter; let all the people come stately to the house of God to worship him, and the ministrations of the pulpit have the single aim to assist that worship, and a better day would soon dawn on Zion. Man-worship would be superseded by God-worship; the ministers of God would be small, and God alone would be exalted in that day. The question would no more be asked, Who is to be the preacher? or is there a cloud in the sky? or what is the prospect of the weather? or will such and such an one be at church? But all would say, as with one voice, Let us go up to the house of the Lord; our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem! How amiable are thy tabernacles, Lord God of hosts. Praise waiteth for thee, O God! in Zion; and to thee shall the vow be performed. O Thou that hearest prayer! unto thee *shall all flesh come*. The blessed effect upon the entire Church of Christ, upon the character and destiny of our country and of the world, would be glorious beyond all imagination. If ever the millennium comes on earth, it will come then, *and not till then*.

2. Portions of the Sabbath are due to *special private devotion*. The duty of private devotion is indeed binding every day of the week, but on the Sabbath it has a special character appropriate to that day. Men of business have their days of special reckoning, when they critically examine and balance their accounts. Such to us should be every Sabbath, in relation to our spiritual interests. A careful review of the past week, thorough self-searching, and a faithful settling up of all accounts with God, should enter into the private devotions of every Sabbath. As there is more time, and

as the mind is also naturally in a higher tone of religious experience on the Sabbath than on other days, there should then be more prolonged and earnest prayer, more full confession, more earnest and all-embracing praise, more launching of the soul into eternity and bathing in the sea of heavenly light and love. Unless something of this is realized in the private devotions, the devotions of the sanctuary will usually be empty and profitless. Unless God is previously enthroned in the heart in the closet, either self or the preacher is apt to keep the throne of it in the sanctuary. Unless there is self-searching, confession, repentance, faith, love, joy in God, the hope that entereth within the veil, in the private devotions of the closet, they will not ordinarily enter into the public devotions of the sanctuary. The fires of devotion that burn on the public altars of God must be first kindled at home on the altar of the heart.

It was not altogether a false idea among the Romans, the like of which we find to have existed among the Greeks and other nations, that there are household gods which must first be propitiated before we enter the public temple. The *penates* and *lares* must be worshipped before Jupiter. This idea has no very distant likeness to that taught in the Gospel. Let there be one only living and true God, and let him be known as seeking first the private and then the public homage of his creatures, and the idea is purely Christian and of the greatest moment. That person who does not worship his God in private, who does not examine his heart, repent of his sins, surrender himself to Christ, pray for himself and for his family and for the world, where no eye but that of God seeth—may commend himself to the eyes of men in the sanctuary, but that God who seeth in secret will not reward him openly. It was on the Christian Sabbath that the primitive disciples of Christ enjoyed the most prolonged and earnest private as well as public devotion; it was on this day that the Apostle John was wrapped in private devotion on the desolate isle of Patmos, and that the gates of heaven were opened to reveal to him the visions and songs of celestial glory.

3. Portions of the Sabbath should be devoted to *religious reading*. The soul requires to be fed with divine truth, not only in connection with public worship, but to assist its private devotions, its self-searchings, its personal religious culture. The amount of time to be thus employed must depend on circumstances, but every individual does well to make it as great as practicable. Nor is it difficult to define the *quality* of the reading suitable for this day. It should be strictly of a decided *religious* nature. First of all, the Bible should hold a prominent place. Next, those books which help us to understand it. In this connection, the best treatises on doctrinal and spiritual Christianity should be carefully studied. Religious history and biography have also an important place.

Those portions of the periodical journals and papers which elucidate the principles of morality and religion, and which instruct us respecting the conflicts and progress of the Redeemer's kingdom, should also be read. It will be seen that a wide compass of the richest reading, including an exhaustless mine of religious literary wealth, is thus allotted to us for the Sabbath. Without wandering from this, but ever within that hallowed circle of reading in which the Sabbath is kept holy unto the Lord, we may employ all the time for reading on the Sabbath to the end of the longest life, and to the highest possible advantage of the heart and intellect. The greatest men that have ever lived on earth have become such by this course. Let only two hours of each Sabbath be thus employed, with earnest thoughtfulness and prayer, for ten years, and the effect upon the entire character in elevating, purifying, and exalting it, would reward the effort a thousand-fold even in this life, and would send its blessings into the everlasting ages.

Oh! when will men cease to profane the Sabbath with political, secular, and even fictitious and idle reading? Unless there is a thorough reform in this matter, at least among professing Christians, pure religion will never revive in our land; the preaching of the Gospel will be increasingly shorn of its power; both Church and State will decline together towards that fearful corruption which has ever brought upon men and nations the terrible judgments of Heaven.

4. A portion of this sacred day is very properly adjudged to the *Sabbath-school*. The social study of the Bible and of Christian catechisms, for people of every age, and especially the young, is evidently in keeping with the holy purposes of the Sabbath. All those who heartily engage in the noble work of superintending and teaching Sabbath-schools, are in this respect serving Christ, and deserve the gratitude of the community. Pastors, elders, deacons, all the fathers and mothers in Zion, are bound to give them hearty sympathy and support. The pastor is responsible for the Sabbath-school, as a part of his flock, and should do all in his power to make it ever remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, and to make it the instrument of pure and sound religious teaching. But after the pastor's duty is fully done, there still remains a great responsibility with the superintendent and other teachers to keep from the school every thing tending to secularize and profane the Sabbath, and to bring all those influences to bear upon it which tend most to renew and save the souls of the pupils.

The sessions should never be so prolonged as to weary the pupils, or in any way to unfit or disincline them or the teachers for the public worship of the sanctuary. A short and spirited session is more than twice as effectual to its end, especially with children, as a long and dull one. Such a session leaves the mind bright, active, eager for the duties of public worship.



The practice of allowing the Sabbath-school to displace attendance on public worship is very wrong. It is making a mere instrumentality of the Church supplant a sacred ordinance of God. In places remote from churches, where children *can not* attend public worship, the Sabbath-school may be the *only* religious service at command, and is therefore no displacement, but may be a valuable substitute for the worship of the sanctuary.

But in all cases where teachers and pupils live in such proximity to the church that they *can* attend public worship, it is their unquestionable duty to attend it. No demands of the Sabbath-school can ever absolve them from this duty. When teachers or pupils excuse themselves from attendance at church, morning or afternoon, with the plea of having previously attended the Sabbath-school, they may satisfy themselves, but they fail to satisfy God. He who said, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," and made the public worship of his house a part of the observance of the day, will not hold them guiltless.

Let all our children, and all who have wisdom and grace to teach them, be ever prompt to their place and duty in the Sabbath-school, and there receive the constant sympathies and prayers and blessings of the Church; let them be equally prompt to their place and duty in the sanctuary, bringing to it the teachings and influences of the Sabbath-school, making this blessed instrumentality subserve the ordinance of God in his worship; let all this be faithfully done, and the Sabbath will be truly a delight, honorable, and the Church will put on her garments of praise.

5. What remains of the Sabbath, deducting the time for necessary temporal cares, should be devoted to *family religion*. Not family and social *recreation*, but *religion*, is demanded by the law to keep the Sabbath holy. Here is a great and disastrous error in a large portion of nominal Christendom, especially continental Europe. The Roman Catholic and the Greek Church allow the latter part of the Sabbath for amusement, and the Lutheran Church is far from being orthodox upon this subject. Luther himself was not therein sound in the faith, and the Reformation under him stopped at a point which has left a large portion of Christian Europe in comparative spiritual darkness and death. The most devout and earnest devotions of one portion of the Sabbath, supposing them to be actually rendered, can never fulfill the law and raise the soul to heaven, so long as the other portion is desecrated to secular amusements.

The importation of foreign customs into our country is fast desecrating the Sabbath, and the pernicious example of our German population, if allowed to take general effect, will, ere long, prove fatal to spiritual religion, and also to free institutions, in this land. Neither pure religion nor free institutions ever did or ever can prosper, when the Christian Sabbath is universally profaned. But



while we are to avoid profaning the Sabbath with worldly recreations on the one hand, we should equally avoid marring its beauty with pharisaical austerities on the other. While we are to turn away our foot from the Sabbath, from doing our *pleasure* on this holy day, we must yet call it a *delight*, the holy of the Lord, honorable. The latter is quite as important as the former. The minds of most persons, especially those of the young, can not be easily kept in that state of tension through the entire Sabbath which is demanded by religious reading and devotion. A portion of the day may therefore be given to familiar intercourse and conversation between the various members of the family. In many families this is the only day of the week in which all the members are together. Resting together from the cares of the world, gathering around the same table, the same fire-side, the same domestic altar, under the benign influences of the Christian Sabbath, they may nourish those mutual affections, deepen those sympathies, mature those friendships, and form those family ties in religion, which will be lasting as life, and will spring into immortal vigor beyond the grave.

It is perhaps one of the most delicate and difficult of all things, to avoid the extremes of austerity and laxness in the family upon the Sabbath. It lies mostly with parents and the older members of the family to give the right direction to the thoughts and conversation of the domestic circle. Words fitly spoken are here like apples of gold in pictures of silver. There is a way to keep the Sabbath holy in the family, and yet to make it a "delight" to all its members. Thrice happy they who find this way, and walk in it!

But the duty of parents does not end here. It is to be feared that many of us are too willing to suppose that the teaching of the Sabbath-school exonerates parents from all responsibility in this matter. But this it can never do. Parents are still bound to inculcate upon their children the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, to labor and pray for their conversion, and to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as earnestly as though no Sabbath-schools were in existence. The Sabbath is the favored day, above all others, when this duty should be in special progress. And very much, I had nearly said *all*, depends upon the parents, whether the teachings of the Sabbath-school and the preaching of the Gospel shall take root and bear fruit in their children. A cold indifference towards the former, or a caustic criticism of the latter, will close the young mind against it. Many an earnest address and many a faithful sermon has been lost to children by the indifference or unkind remark of the parent.

The time forbids us to dwell on these particulars. We perceive that the keeping of the Sabbath holy blesses the family in all its members and relations, and is to it of more real value than all

possible treasures of gold and diamonds. In thus blessing the family it blesses the nation and the world. When this keeping of the Sabbath holy shall universally obtain, our sons will be as plants grown up by our side, and our daughters will be as corner-stones polished after the similitude of a palace.

In conclusion, the question may arise, whether the Sabbath *can* really be kept holy to the Lord, as we have indicated. It certainly *can* be—it *has been* thus kept by thousands of individuals and of families, whose reward, great on earth, will be enduring as eternity. Nor does the duty involve the least hardship or unnatural restraint. Rightly viewed, it is a free, liberal, joyous service; the precise allotment of time most conducive to the health and vigor of both soul and body. Suppose we allow nine hours for sleep and the toilet, an allowance adequate for every age and condition; allow also two hours for meals, and two more for necessary exercise and duties; there will remain eleven hours from the twenty-four. Allow an hour and a quarter each for four public services, including the Sabbath-school, and an hour more for going and coming, and we use seven hours in this connection. If the distance from church is great, the number of attendances is usually so much reduced as to make seven hours a very large average for this purpose. Of the four remaining hours, two may be given to private reading and devotion, and two to social family intercourse and religion.

Nothing can be more practicable, nothing more worthy of God to require or of man to render. Indolence, sloth, worldliness, sensuality, aversion to religion, are the only things that oppose. These apart, the duty is joyous and beautiful as a morning sunbeam. God demands it, reason approves it, human experience of all ages commands it; health and virtue and happiness make it needful; all that renders the present life most desirable, and the life to come hopeful, pleads for it with trumpet tongue.

No sooner will the people thus honor the Sabbath, than God will remember his promise, and honor them, and cause them to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed them with the heritage of Jacob. The bright vision of prophets will then be realized. A voice of omnipotent power will then say unto Zion: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee; and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

## S E R M O N I X.

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## EXEMPLIFYING RELIGION IN DOMESTIC RELATIONS.

"RETURN to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee."—LUKE 8 : 39, first part.

THIS command occurs in connection with our Lord's miraculous acts in the country of the Gadarenes, and was addressed to the man dispossessed of the legion of devils. It would seem that Jesus had gone over to this city with the special though secret purpose of performing this miracle. The man upon whom it was wrought was well known; he had been *a long time* and violently affected; his malady had been apparent to all the dwellers in the place, and the act of healing, therefore, which had been just as open and conspicuous, afforded the more striking proof of Christ's power, and the more signal attestation of his divine character and mission. He showed not only that the elements of nature, but evil spirits also, were subject to his control—that all power was committed to him in heaven and on earth. The different effects produced upon different persons by the present miracle, are noticed very carefully by the evangelist. The Gadarenes "were afraid," and desired Jesus to "depart out of their coasts." The poor sufferer, now "clothed and in his right mind," was overwhelmed with gratitude; and so far from dreading the Saviour, who had so wonderfully restored him, he "besought him that he might remain with him." It was in reply to this request that the text was uttered. Our Lord probably concluded that when the first feelings of excitement and alarm had subsided, the Gadarenes would naturally be led to reflect upon the events they had witnessed. And then the presence of him who was restored to soundness would either convince them of Christ's mission and authority, or be a living reproof of their unbelief and ingratitude.

I design to use the text at the present time to set forth the duty of exemplifying religion in the family and immediate domestic relations.

Wherever the renovating power of divine grace has been experienced, there a blessing has been conferred far richer and more lasting than that of which this poor demoniac was the recipient. Sinners are the victims of a possession more oppressive and deadly than any he felt; and the Son of God alone, by his divine spirit,

can break the thralldom and set them free. His renewing grace allays the violence of the passions, subdues the destructive virulence of corruption, unbinds the fetters which guilt casts upon the soul, restores the sinner to his right mind, and clothes his nakedness with the all-sufficient righteousness of Christ, the garments of salvation. "*Great things are done*" for the convert in the first moment of believing, for he is rescued from condemnation and made an heir of glory. "*Great things are done*" also for the Christian day by day, in preserving his graces in exercise amidst the contaminating influences of the world; in restoring him after backsliding; in defending him against temptation; in leading him on, notwithstanding obstructions, and difficulties, and still keeping his hope alive and his feet in the right way. The source of these blessings, from first to last, is God himself. The Father provides, the Son purchases, the Holy Spirit applies redemption to the soul, and crowns the grace below with glory hereafter.

Now, where this benefit has been enjoyed, a solemn *duty* rests upon the recipient to "*show forth what God hath done.*" For grace is not imparted to be kept a secret from the world, but to be declared and exhibited for their good. It is not a light enkindled to be hid under a bushel, but to be set on a candlestick that it may give light to all around; that others may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven. The spirit with which we should speak of our religious exercises, is to be carefully guarded. It must not be that of ostentation, or vain boasting; we must not obtrude our peculiar experiences upon unfitting places and occasions; but with humbleness of mind, as opportunity offers, we should be ready to give a reason of the hope that is in us; and by a deportment becoming the Gospel, we should at all times commend and illustrate the grace of God wrought in us.

Union with the Church by a *public profession* is one of the ways in which we may "*show*" our love to the person, and subjection to the authority of Christ; and it is both enjoined in Scripture and is imperative in the very nature of the case. So that an unwillingness to obey this requirement, under whatever plausible excuses, gives painful evidence of the lack of true religion in the heart. Yet it is a comparatively easy thing, we must admit, in most instances, to make such a profession at the present time; for religion (at least the outward form of it) has become popular, and no pains or disgrace, but rather the reverse, attach to the open avowal of our sentiments; while truly to exemplify its spirit in all relations, may be a much more difficult and infrequent attainment. The case is therefore somewhat reversed from what existed in the early Church. For there Christianity was so much abhorred, and its followers were so bitterly persecuted, that nothing but an irresistible conviction of its truth, and the deep feeling of its power, would lead any one to make confession before the world.

The avowal implied a readiness to suffer for Christ's sake, and would not be lightly or insincerely made. Now, however, it is respectable: other inducements may prevail: and we must look to the spirit and the life for evidence that Christ has indeed been formed within the hope of glory. Therefore we are called upon not only to profess outward subjection, but eminently to evidence our faith by showing in our converse with men, "the mind that was in Christ Jesus;" that in our objects of preference and pursuit, in our tempers and deportment, we are actuated by the pure, courteous, self-denying, unworldly, and elevated principles and affections the Gospel inculcates. In a word, that we believe the religion of the New Testament to be much more than a decent observance, or a fine theory; that it is an experimental and practical matter, and that we mean, by assisting grace, to carry out its requisitions through our whole life.

This being so, I will proceed to state *some* REASONS why it should eminently be made manifest by us in the family relation. "Return to *thine house*, and show how great things God hath done unto thee."

1. The first general reason is, that this is the proper place to *commence* all our efforts to do good. Our piety, to be of any worth must, it is true, pervade every relation and sanctify every service. There is no sphere of activity, there is no connection we form, there is no duty, public or private, from which our religion can be excluded, where it must not be the pervading and controlling element. We are responsible to God every where, and at all times. We are bound to glorify him in our bodies and in our spirits, which are his; wheresoever we are, we are to realize that we are in his empire; and whatever we do, we are to do all to his glory. But then there is an obvious fitness that this universal service should *begin* in the family, and there exhale its sweetest and holiest influence; for,

*In the first place*, the dearest relations of the world are there; the purest affections are there elicited; and it may well be imagined that if our religion prompts us to be solicitous for the welfare of our fellow-men, (as genuine religion surely will,) our anxieties will be first and most tenderly awakened for our "brethren, our kindred according to the flesh." Naturally we shall be earnest to lead them to that precious Saviour we have found. And in order to this, we shall most carefully avoid every thing which will be likely to exert an injurious influence upon their minds, and do every thing that shall present religion in its own amiable and attractive form, so that they may be won by our godly conversation. As piety is affectionate in its spirit, one would imagine that in the domestic circle we should delight chiefly to indulge its promptings. It regards the soul and its eternal state, and nature

itself claims that our efforts should be most direct and earnest for the salvation of those we most love: that, with Paul, we should be able to say, "God is my record how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ;" that we should travail in birth "until Christ be formed in them the hope of glory."

But *again*: the family is the place of our most powerful and constant *influence*. The outward influence of different persons is, of course, widely various in degree, as well as in kind, depending upon the contingencies of favorable circumstances, position, association, as much, often, as upon personal worth. But in his own domestic sphere every person has a favorable position, and there each infallibly exerts a constant influence: the husband upon the wife, and the wife upon the husband; parents upon children, and children upon parents; brothers upon sisters, and sisters upon brothers. There is a direct and a reciprocal action, silent, unperceived often, but ceaseless and almost omnipotent, for good or for evil. It commences with the conjugal union, with the very dawn of intelligence in children; it is exerted every day, and at all hours of the day, and it comes at length to mould thought, feeling, sentiment, manners, the motions of the body, and almost the expression of the countenance to one form and standard. Such is the combined effect of habit and affection over the mind and heart, and while this fact gives encouragement to the true Christian, and prompts him to hope that his "labor will not be in vain in the Lord," that "in due season he shall reap, if he faint not," it also distinctly imposes upon him the solemn obligation specially to consecrate his influence in this sphere to the glory of God and the good of these precious souls. If he wisely, unobtrusively, humbly, and consistently commend the grace of Christ, in spirit and in act, he may rest assured that in the end he shall not lose his reward. In any case, however, let him remember that influence he will exert, and it must be for good or evil. Indifference, if it were possible, would work evil; but he exerts a direct agency. Let him ever remember that this is the first field next to his own heart, where God requires him to work. "The unbelieving husband may thus be sanctified by the believing wife;" the parent, the child, the brother, or sister, may be the means of securing spiritual and everlasting good to the object of fond natural affection. And no excuse of diffidence on our part, or unwillingness on the part of others to hear, can be allowed to annul our responsibility. If we can not speak to them, we can pray for them; and we can exhibit in their sight the meek and godly conversation becoming the Gospel, so that they may be won by our example. The pious servant has often brought religion into the family, and to the heart of a thoughtless master or mistress; the Sabbath-school child to a worldly father or mother. There, if any where, we can make our influence felt. And individual in-



fluence, consistently, perseveringly exerted, has at length brought many a Christless household to a delightful religious condition. The conversion of one has been a prediction, "This day is salvation come to this house."

2. But secondly, the importance of making this matter a subject of express injunction, will appear from another consideration: *The common backwardness to perform this duty.* We do find, that however tender and strong may be the motives which impel us to introduce our religious efforts into the family circle, there is, at this point, a strange and very prevalent diffidence, and a very general neglect of duty: an insurmountable embarrassment in freely opening our minds upon religious subjects with those with whom we are brought into such familiar relations, deters and frequently prevents. It operates in various directions. The soul under conviction experiences this diffidence in disclosing to near relatives its religious anxieties and desires; so that, perhaps, for a long time, the struggles endured under conviction, or the hope entertained, is rigidly concealed. The same difficulty very often prevents parents from free and particular conversation with their children upon the concerns of the soul: the husband with the wife, and the wife with the husband. Why is this? Why is it, that on any and every topic of ordinary concern, in relation, too, to our own feelings and affections, in relation to the conduct and failures of our friends, we are free to speak, to instruct, to rebuke, to advise, and yet, on this confessedly most momentous topic our lips are sealed: sealed too, towards those in whom we feel the most tender interest, on the subject about which we desire them most carefully to reflect? Whatever be the reason, the fact is painfully common. And possibly with some unacknowledged hope of appeasing conscience, by substituting one duty for another, the temptation is urgent to perform many other religious services, to make painful sacrifices, to do much out-door duty, rather than fairly and faithfully meet this one self-denying demand. The greater the call, therefore, at this point to take up the cross—the more important the direction, "*Return to thine own house*"—the greater need of vigilance here, both for the improvement of our own piety and for the good of such as are committed to our charge; lest we may have sad occasion to say in the end, when the religious improvement of the family does not answer what might have been expected from the intelligence and piety of the head of it; "They made me a keeper of vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept." Is it not possible, brethren, that we here touch the very point of defect in the family training of many professing Christians? Do we not here come at the main reason, so far as human agency is concerned, why, in the domestic circles of some eminent Christians, there occur instances of sad indifference to divine things, and of open profanity and irreligion?

We often see this startling incongruity : an eminently pious father with a godless son ; a mother adorning her other graces with the beauty of holiness, yet having a thoughtless daughter ; religious parents with a whole household of very careless and irreligious children. I would not, by any means, convey the idea that parents or relatives are absolutely responsible for the piety of their friends or families, for God alone can change the heart ; but for our diligence and fidelity we are responsible. And it may happen, from some of the causes I have mentioned, that while there is a fair exhibition by us of the sincerity and power of our faith in all other places, just in that spot where it is most needed, and *we* are peculiarly responsible, there may have been great culpability. "Thine own house" may have been overlooked, and in punishment thy heart may be afterwards pierced with many sorrows. The Lord help us to consider this, and make friends faithful with friends, and parents faithful with their children. He who has constituted the endearing family relation, and thrown round it his sacred shield, and dispenses there the purest earthly blessings, will not despise the importunate pious yearnings and the wise endeavors of a father's or a mother's heart. "Oh ! that Ishmael may live before thee : " oh ! that my children may be all taught of God, is a prayer that will come up with acceptance into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth, who is, in a marked sense, the God of the families of his saints.

3. I ADD, that the direction of the text demands our special attention, because it contemplates a *sphere where some peculiar difficulties exist*, which are apt to interfere with the exemplification of high religious consistency. The backwardness of which I have spoken is, indeed, of itself one great difficulty ; yet, there are others, springing in a measure out of the family constitution, and to which this diffidence may be in part attributed, which I would now bring into view.

The very *intimacy*, then, of the domestic intercourse, although, to an engaged and consistent Christian, it is made subservient to his fidelity and usefulness, often becomes a snare and a hindrance to one who does not religiously govern himself and watch against temptations. The believer, who is prayerful in his closet, deserves to be called the prayerful man : he who is diligent in secret religious duties, and strict in the work of self examination, is certainly the man of sincerity and uprightness, rather than one who is only or chiefly careful to abound in those duties in which he may be seen of men. But, I think, he should be called Christ's disciple indeed, who carries his religion into his own house, and uses it in the family and not simply in company—who wears it every day, and not on set occasions merely. The test being the more stringent, is the more satisfactory. For, although a man may be content, and able to play a part before many observers, and for

short periods, he can hardly do this at all times and before all spectators, particularly in his retired hours and before his daily intimates. Rather, we shall find the hypocrite avenging himself upon his family for that strictness and grimace he compels himself to wear before the world. So that, it is not uncommon to find the man who is all meekness and submission before observers, a tyrant in his family—the saint abroad, a sad sinner at home. Now, for the sake of our own improvement, and for the good of our families, and the honor of religion, the domestic circle should be eminently the scene of the amiable and elevated Christian graces. And we should make special effort for this, because some peculiar obstacles may lie in the way. We should recollect, that it may be more difficult in every day domestic intercourse to avoid irritations and petulance, or violence of temper, and to exemplify the Gospel, than in more public places, where often a mask is worn—where we are put upon our guard, and an artificial state of feeling supplants that which is entirely easy and natural. The freedom of family intercourse also is apt to take off restraints to the indulgence of our passions and to the display of our real dispositions, which are felt in more public scenes. And daily recurring annoyances, or petty troubles, may carry us beyond the bounds of Christian propriety, to the great injury of such as are the observers or victims of our unsanctified tempers. But he that, in these things, approveth himself to God, is approved indeed. Let us be mindful, that the greater the impunity with which we may transgress, the greater the danger: the more strict and uniform our piety in such circumstances, the more powerful and happy our example—the more easy and impressive our words of admonition or entreaty. If the domestic hearth be made a place of pure and amiable affections; if round the family circle is diffused an atmosphere of religious tranquillity; if, while the forms of piety are observed, the spirit of piety breathes forth its fresh and invigorative power; if jars and contentions, moroseness and discontent, petulance and strife, give place to gentleness, meekness, submission, love to the Saviour and love to our fellow-men; if whatsoever things are pure and lovely, and of good report, prevail there, God will dwell in the midst of the endeared circle—there a preaching is employed that will be apt to sway the heart, an influence is exerted which will live in the memory while life lasts, and will extend itself to future generations, commending and enforcing the beauty of true holiness. To those scenes of domestic peace, which pure religion created and adorned, the thoughts of the youngest member of the family will cling in after-years; they will become a kind of hallowed ground in his memory; they will exert a restraining and sanctifying power; and thus, may we expect to see the promise fulfilled: "Train up a child in the way in which he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

This is the way to make home attractive, by making it happy; and this is the way to fulfill the great purposes of God in the domestic constitution, by making the family the nursery of the Church, and like the vestibule of heaven.

What, then, shall we say to those who never have set up the standard of religion in their households? The very place where, of all others, it is most appropriate! What to those who never read the Scriptures; who never pray in their families; where no supplicating voice of father or mother goes up to the throne of God, nor calls down, morning and evening, needful blessings upon the group of young immortals coming forth to the temptations of earth, hasting on to the awards of eternity? Can a father thus cast out his offspring from his regards, or deprive them (so far as his neglect can do it) of the shield of God's favor? Can a pious mother, amidst her hourly solicitude for the health, peace, and prosperity of her beloved charge, forget their most essential interests? Will she not strive that her "sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; and her daughters as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace?" I can not but urge the subject upon the thoughts of parents, and heads of families, with special earnestness. The credit and consistency and improvement of their own piety, the spiritual good of the young, the prosperity of the Church, the security of the State, are all linked in with this duty of family religion. Let it be the religion of a uniformly Christian example, of fervent private prayer for their households; but of direct personal efforts with them also. Then may you hope that the words of pious expectation shall be verified in their case: "The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee."

But the exhortation reaches all those who form part of the domestic circle. The Christian must there exhibit the graces of the Spirit in careful exemplification, whatever be his position. Religion must be felt in every direction and through every relation. As a reverential and affectionate son or daughter, a kind brother or sister, a faithful domestic or considerate master, a careful husband or tender wife, each sphere must be adorned with the graces of true piety. If here we fail, little will outward show of zeal profit. If here we exemplify and do the will of God, we may be sure that, like sweet perfume, our piety will diffuse its odor every where. It cannot be confined to one place, but will become perceptible, and gratify and bless in every word and act, in every trial and duty, in every relation and enjoyment of life. Domestic religion sets the seal of sincerity and truth upon our profession; and as it frequently requires great self-denial, so will its exercise the better prepare us for all other demands upon a self-sacrificing spirit, and eminently ripen our souls for the blessed companionship of "the whole family in heaven."